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ABSTRACT

In efforts to make parents feel more welcome at school and to increase their involvement, a number of schools are creating parent centers--providing parents with a room of their own in the school. Part I of this report examines the role of parent centers in strengthening family-school relationships through case studies of four parent centers in urban schools, three elementary and one junior high. The case studies illustrate how parent centers are created and developed, the types of projects and programs they develop and implement, the dynamics through which they work to achieve family-school partnerships, and effects on children's academic and social success. In Part II, cross-site analyses of the case study information combined with the survey information are conducted to examine the links that exist between the work of parent centers and Federal, state, and local policies pertaining to school-family relationships. In Part III, the policy implications of parent centers are drawn in four areas: child care, integrated services, teacher outreach to parents, and home visits. Appendixes contain six graphs describing programs. (Contains 21 references.) (Author)

CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

PARENT CENTERS IN URBAN SCHOOLS

Four Case Studies

Vivian R. Johnson
Boston University

Report No. 23 / April 1994

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CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS AND CHILDREN'S LEARNING

The nation's schools must do more to improve the education of all children, but schools cannot do this alone. More will be accomplished if families and communities work with children, with each other, and with schools to promote successful students.

The mission of this Center is to conduct research, evaluations, policy analyses, and dissemination to produce new and useful knowledge about how families, schools, and communities influence students motivation, learning and development. A second important goal is to improve the connections between and among these major social institutions.

Two research programs guide the Center's work: the Program on the Early Years of Childhood, covering children aged 0-10 through the elementary grades; and the Program on the Years of Early and Late Adolescence, covering youngsters aged 11-19 through the middle and high school grades.

Research on family, school, and community connections must be conducted to understand more about all children and all families, not just those who are economically and educationally advantaged or already connected to school and community resources. The Center's projects pay particular attention to the diversity in family, school, and community practices that support families in helping children succeed across the years of childhood and adolescence. Projects also examine policies at the Federal, state, and local levels that produce effective partnerships.

A third program of Institutional Activities includes a wide range of dissemination projects to extend the Center's national leadership. The Center's work will yield new information, practices, and policies to promote partnerships among families, communities, and schools to benefit children's learning.

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ABSTRACT

In efforts to make parents feel more welcome at school and increase their involvement, a number of schools are creating parent centers -- providing parents with a room of their own in the school. Part I of this report examines the role of parent centers in strengthening family-school relationships through case studies of four parent centers in urban schools, three elementary and one junior high. The case studies illustrate how parent centers are created and developed, the types of projects and programs they develop and implement, the dynamics through which they work to achieve family-school partnerships, and effects on children's academic and social success. In Part II, cross-site analyses of the case study information combined with the survey information are conducted to examine the links that exist between the work of parent centers and Federal, state, and local policies pertaining to school-family relationships. In Part III, the policy implications of parent centers and are drawn in four areas: child care, integrated services, teacher outreach to parents, and home visits.

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Introduction

Parental involvement improves children's academic performance and improves schools (Henderson, 1980, 1987). While the evidence increases, there are continuing problems of involving large numbers of parents in schools, especially in schools located in urban areas. Chavkin and Williams (1993) note that research evidence demonstrates, however, that:

> ...all parents, regardless of ethnicity or minority status, are concerned about their children's education. But most important, in addition to being concerned, parents want to take an active role in their children's education. (p. 80)

A growing number of urban schools are helping parents take an active role in their children's education by developing parent or family centers[1] that provide parents with a room of their own in the schools. These centers have received less attention than other aspects of school restructuring and reform, but they -- and the schools that create them -- require closer examination because they represent settings in which to promote the school-home partnerships suggested for effective school reform (Davies, Burch, and Johnson, 1991).

This report examines the role of parent centers in strengthening family-school relationships, building on an earlier component of our Center on Families study which investigated eight dimensions of functioning of such centers (Johnson, 1993). The report presents case studies of four urban schools which are developing school-based strategies to enhance collaboration between home and school to promote children's academic and social success. Two of the schools are in Boston, Massachusetts and two are in San Diego, California.

The schools illustrate a variety of school characteristics and parent center features. Three are elementary schools that vary in size and in the racial and language backgrounds of their student populations. The fourth is a junior high school that has an unusually high level of parental participation, given the fact that the level of parental participation tends to decrease as students move from elementary to junior and senior high school (Epstein and Dauber, 1991). Parent centers in each of the schools are at various levels of development; one center has evolved from a PTA that has minutes of meetings beginning in 1924, while another center is just starting. All four schools have stated objectives of promoting family collaboration in school improvement and all are members of the League of Schools Reaching Out, a network of 89 schools from Puerto Rico to Hawaii seeking to expand and improve children's learning through en-

[1] The more commonly used generic term "parent center" will be used throughout this report. Exceptions will be made when a center is called the "Family Center" by those in a particular school.

hanced partnerships with parents and communities.[2] Case study information about the schools has been gathered through interviews (with principals, teachers, parents, parent center coordinators, and community participants), observations of parent center activities, document review, and site visits from 1991 through 1993.

Conceptual Framework -- Overlapping Spheres of Influence: Home, School and Community

To gain perspective on the dynamics of the interaction between parents and schools that parent centers promote in the case study schools, we will place these interactions within a conceptual framework that provides a means for examining the school and family encounters and processes that occur within the centers. The overlapping spheres of influence perspective proposed by Epstein (1987) provides a model for studying and understanding school, family, and community relationships. It pictures spheres that can be pushed together or pulled apart as institutions and individuals come together or move apart as a result of practices or other interpersonal forces. The model takes into account changes in environments, variations in practices within those changes, and the interactions of individuals in contact regarding the children whose education is their major concern (Epstein, in press). (See Appendix 1.)

Within this conceptual framework of "overlapping spheres of influence," parent centers can be viewed as connectors -- a force pulling the family, school and community spheres of influence together to develop greater overlap between and among them. Parent centers may provide a range of assistance to the school, to the children, to the teachers and to the parents including: classroom, clerical, logistical, governance, planning, fundraising, as well as assistance with special events. Parent center activities not only support the formal instructional program in schools, but they also support teachers who deliver the services, children who receive the services, and parents, for whom personal and family support may be required to enable them to assist in children's school development.

The supportive function of parent centers is examined in the initial study of 28 parent centers in 14 states (Johnson, 1993). Because a literature search revealed no literature on parent centers concerning their purpose, structure, and function, the initial study gathered information about eight dimensions of functioning: 1) definitions/purposes/design, 2) initiation, 3) physical space, 4) names, 5) staffing,

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[2] The League of Schools Reaching Out is a school reform effort of the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) and is aimed at developing and demonstrating strategies for families and communities to meaningfully contribute to success for all children. The League is a network of schools in the U.S. and five other countries working with IRE and one another to develop and field test these new ideas. The League is currently funded by the Boston Foundation, Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust, Danforth Foundation, Charles Hayden Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, the Plan for Social Excellence, and an anonymous donor.

6) funding, 7) hours of operation, and 8) activities. In this extension of the study, four urban school case studies are discussed within the context of these eight dimensions of functioning and examined within the Epstein (1987) model. Each case study considers both the variations in practices within environments which are influenced by parent centers as well as ways that the centers bring together the overlapping spheres of families and schools.

Report from the Survey of 28 Schools: Definitions, Purposes, and Design of Parent Centers

In our initial survey study of 28 schools, we learned that schools defined parent centers as places where parents and other family members meet, plan, and implement programs that parents initiate or which they develop cooperatively with school staff and community participants. The centers are special places for parents to gather and decide what they will do and how they will do it. The design of the space as well as the staffing, funding, hours of operation, and activities support and accommodate parents. The centers facilitate information sharing, organizing (such as developing schedules for volunteers), and training (such as training to assist teachers and children in the classroom) within the school environment, and help meet such basic needs as housing, food, and health care within the family environment.

PART I: FOUR CASE STUDIES

School Case Example 1

A Parent Center's Purpose and Design Support Basic Needs, Education, and Training for Families

By five minutes after eight on a Friday morning, a line of parents is moving quickly by tables in the school gym as each person picks up one or more bags of groceries that include fresh fruit, vegetables, canned goods, pasta, and rice. Some parents pause on their way out of the school building to greet friends who are just arriving to join the line or to exchange information with other parents about school and community events.

The people behind the tables passing out the bags of food are also parents from the school who are serving as bagging and delivery volunteers for the school's food bank program. Coordinated by the parent center, the program includes organized schedules in which recipients of the bags of food serve as volunteers on a rotating basis so that 24 workers bag groceries received from a city-sponsored food supplement program every other Friday. The bags of groceries, worth $50, are sold for one dollar each, and families in the school may purchase as many bags as they need. This food bank is one aspect of a parent center program that both addresses some basic needs of families and also provides training for parents to work in classrooms or tutor individual students. The center program, discussed below, also includes information, education, and training programs for parents and support groups on special topics such as "death and dying" and "child abuse."

School Context

The John P. Holland Elementary School in Boston, Massachusetts is a modern stucco structure surrounded by seven acres of land in a large community school complex. An Olympic-size swimming pool and a large gymnasium are located in the community school component. Students use both facilities during the school day; the community school opens after three o'clock.

The school is an open-space school with only a few self-contained classrooms, and learning areas are located in six pods. Within each pod is an art room, music room, library, and computer lab. Computer equipment and Jostens Learning programs have been donated by the school's business partner. Open areas within each pod are used for large group activities, and each pod has a Pod Leader who chairs meetings during teachers' common planning time.

Professional development is carried out in a program in which older children are paired with younger children to free teachers for hour-long seminars on instructional topics such as whole language, teaching in the content area, and creative writing. The school has three administrative staff, a teaching staff of 51 teachers (including eight bilingual and twelve special education teachers), and eighteen paraprofessionals. The school serves 785 children aged four to twelve in grades K-5.

The children are ethnically, linguistically, and racially diverse (47% African American, 30% Latino, 18% Asian, and 5% white).

The school-wide Chapter 1 program provides staff with the flexibility to plan and implement a whole language reading program emphasizing literature and writing. Part of the 90 minutes of reading/language arts instruction each morning is DEAR Time ("Drop Everything and Read") during which everyone in the school is engaged in silent reading. A Reading Recovery Program for first graders provides extra assistance with reading skills development. In a math and technology project, students work with math manipulatives. In Saturday mentoring programs for boys and girls in grades three to five African American male and female professionals provide supplemental academic, cultural, and recreational activities.

Staffing and Funding the Parent Center

The parent center is staffed by a Parent Coordinator who is also the Chapter 1 Parent Coordinator for the school. She works closely with the principal in outreach to parents and works with teachers so that parent center activities and school activities are closely connected. When the parent center began in 1989, the principal used a combination of Chapter 1 and school funds to support it, but it is currently funded through various school activities and some grant funding.

The school is a large building, and an appropriate space was selected for the parent center. However, the principal, Janet Williams, noted in an interview: "Space should not be a limitation as far as opening a parent center. If there's a place for parents to meet, then it can be done." The parent center is open daily. The building also houses a community school, so a custodian is in the building until 10:30 p.m., and evening activities occur without difficulty. The principal also pointed out, however, that "if the goal is to get parents involved throughout the school, they're not going to be sitting in their space often, but collaborating with the principal and teachers throughout the building with many things to do."

The parent center program includes information sharing, parent education, and training programs and support groups on special topics that parents request.

Information-Sharing

The information-sharing component of the program is integrated into all other functions of the parent center. For example, during parent meetings, representatives of community agencies provide information about social agency assistance with fuel, day care, Head Start, and housing. A large information bulletin board in the family center includes job listings, free activities, courses, and a listing of addresses of community agencies.

Information is also provided through a connection of the parent center with a local health center. Once a month, health center representatives and parents from the school make door-to-door visits in the neighborhood to inform people about the availability of services, school and community meetings, and other activities. The home visitors distribute free product samples they have requested and received from various companies and businesses.

Parent Education

The parent education component of the parent center program also includes home visits made by two "parent home workers," funded by Chapter 1. They visit parents on request and demonstrate school skills -- showing parents how to help their children with homework --or help parents with referrals to community agencies for family assistance. The home workers also meet groups of parents in their homes, at community meeting places, or at school to provide workshops or other assistance.

Teachers working with parents in the center have created learning games to send home for parents to use with children to practice school skills. These materials help parents work with their children on less stressful activities than school worksheets while covering similar content.

The parent center has also offered a computer course for the past three years. Each course, offered in Spanish as well as English, has 35 to 50 parents enrolled. Children use the computers during school hours; in the evening, parents use them in introductory as well as advanced courses. A typing course is also offered. Completion of the typing course provided one mother with a skill that enabled her to get a $50 a week raise in a job, which allowed her to get off welfare. She was so pleased with the Center's provision of a course that gave her typing skills that she donated the first $50 of her raise to the parent center.

Parent Training

Training to prepare parents to volunteer in classrooms or tutor children individually is provided by the parent center coordinator with the assistance of teachers and other experienced parents. The training begins with identification of parents' strengths and interests. Preliminary activities include opportunities to discuss curriculum with teachers and observe classroom lessons and management. Parents may work with teachers on a particular lesson or theme, read stories during the school's daily 90 minute reading period, or bring items of interest from home to share with a class. Teachers invite parents to work with them on special projects such as dinosaurs or aquariums. Parents often assist with field trips or events related to the projects.

This school case illustrates how parent centers pull families and schools together while supporting needs within both spheres -- basic needs as well as education and training needs of families; classroom assistance needs of teachers, and individual tutoring needs of children.

According to school personnel, the children of the ten parents with the greatest involvement and therefore overlap with this school, achieved significant academic improvement. After three years of their parents' involvement in various school and home learning activities, all the children's scores on standardized tests went from below average to well above average. Several of the children's scores were at the fortieth percentile when parents began participating in the school; the scores were near the eightieth percentile after three years. The children who made the greatest gains were those whose parents were most involved in home learning as well as school activities. These findings are consistent with the theoretical expectations and other research results (Epstein, 1992).

Test score results indicating that increased overlap between the goals and practices of families and schools can improve children's academic performance tend to substantiate the internal structure of Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres model. She states:

> The degree of overlap of family and school organizations and their goals and practices affect the social and psychological distance between the family and school members, their patterns of communication, and the results or outcomes of more or less interaction. (p. 130)

Thus in our first school case study, the parent center provided opportunities for greater overlap between family and school goals and practices through parent information, education and training programs. The activities conducted in the parent center by its staff supported families and the school, and resulted in observed improvement in children's academic achievement.

Results from the Survey of 28 Schools: Initiation of Parent Centers

Twenty-six of the twenty-eight schools in our initial study reported that they opened their parent centers in the past five years (Johnson, 1993). This reflects a growing change in the United States toward increases in the number and variations in practices to improve home-school communications and collaborations. Epstein (1987) notes four trends that have changed these connections over the past five decades: 1) increase in mothers receiving college education and degrees, 2) influence of child rearing literature such as *Baby and Child Care* by Dr. Benjamin Spock, 3) federal regulations and funding for parental involvement, and 4) changing family structures. She concludes:

> The four trends have over the past four to five decades changed family-school connections in the United States. The events, singly and in combination, involved more parents in their children's education beyond preschool, officially and publicly recognized parents as "teachers," and increased the need for better communications between the home and school. (p. 125)

Schools report that parent centers increase family-school communication by connecting between the two institutions. In the centers, parents and teachers can meet over extended periods and outside formal rituals such as parent-teacher conferences and open house. The mutual interests and influences of families and schools can be acknowledged, examined, and promoted by policies and practices that support teachers and parents in improving children's motivation and achievement in school. Parent centers "...recognize the important similarities, overlap in goals, responsibilities, and mutual influences of the two major environments which simultaneously affect children's learning and development" (p. 130).

The development of parent centers is a recent process in most schools. With the exception of one center that evolved from a PTA that began in 1924 and another center that started in 1979, all others began within the past five years. Most were started as a result of: 1) parents' request for a place of their own, 2) teachers' and parents' request for space to work together more closely, 3) implementation of a school district policy on parental involvement, or 4) a principal's leadership (Johnson, 1993).

Our next school case example illustrates a school whose mission promoted the initiation of a center focusing on family inclusion.

School Case Example 2

A Family Center Supports Inclusion: "We are All Special!"

As families enter the school on a crisp fall morning, the smell of bacon and sausage cooking greets them and leads them to the school's Family Center. Each year, new families are welcomed to the school with a pancake breakfast. Parents who pause in the halls to read children's work posted outside classrooms are greeted by teachers and students as they return to their classes from the playground or by the custodian on his rounds throughout the building. Arriving at the family center located in the library, families join the breakfast line to get a plate of pancakes, sausage, bacon, coffee, and juice, and then sit at one of the tables with other families. Toddlers sit on the floor looking at picture books or eating breakfast with other family members while infants sit on laps or in strollers next to parents. In the breakfast line and at the tables, families already active in the school welcome newcomers, teachers drop in between classes to greet families and eat, and the principal speaks with each family as he goes from one table to the next. Informal discussion about the school, its mission and programs is heard around the tables and families exchange information about their children's names, grades, and location in the school. Questions about procedures, events, resources, and the daily life of the school are posed and answered in the relaxed atmosphere of a user-friendly place.

Comfortable interaction between new and older families is promoted at this school by events such as the welcome breakfast, apple-picking, and family math night. All of these events include a

wide range of activities so that everyone can get involved, because the school has inclusive education as its focus. The principal, teachers, and veteran parents work at finding additional strategies to improve their effectiveness in outreach. They appear to constantly wish to modify traditional school patterns and procedures in order to improve home-school connections and reach their goal of total inclusion.

School Context

Located on a busy urban thoroughfare in a racially and economically mixed neighborhood in Boston, Massachusetts, the Patrick O'Hearn School is a modern brick structure with trees planted at the school's sidewalk entrance. The trees were planted several years ago by fathers and children to celebrate the opening of the Family Center. Student escorts proudly pointed out the trees to visitors arriving for the center's opening festivities.

Visitors also noted large posters in the school's entrance, each of which proclaimed "Inclusion is..." followed by children's statements: "no one stands alone," "together we learn," "showered with love," and "make room in your heart for everyone."

With inclusive education as its focus, the school became a special education integration model in 1989. The mission statement defines full inclusion: "Students who are involved in regular education, students who have moderate to severe disabilities, and students considered talented and gifted learn together and from each other. Teachers and support staff team to work together with all children in integrated classrooms."

The relatively small school serves 219 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. The staff includes the principal, nine regular and nine special education teachers, and one Chapter 1 teacher. The students have a wide range of ethnic, linguistic, and economic backgrounds: 61% are African American, 30% are white, 5% are Latino and 4% are Southeast Asian; and 78% participate in the free or reduced lunch program. A special feature of the school year program which reinforces the inclusion model is a Very Special Arts project in which "...talented artists who are trained to teach in integrated settings visit the school for extended periods to instruct the children in diverse topics such as art, music, drama, and movement."

The school has a School-Based Management/Shared Decision-Making administrative structure with an equal number of parents and school staff working together to administer the school. Five teachers and six parents are elected as representatives to work with the principal on matters affecting curriculum, personnel, and budget. However, in keeping with the school philosophy, meetings are open and well publicized, and the representatives are joined by many other people interested in school governance. Members of the School-Based Management Council are elected

annually and meetings are held monthly. A monthly newsletter, *The O'Hearn Family Center News*, also keeps people informed about school matters. The Council recently developed of a long-range plan for the school which includes a continuing role for the Family Center as a special linking place in the school.

Name and Space Reflects Inclusion and Support

Respondents to the initial survey questionnaire indicated that the special places for parents in their schools were most frequently called "parent centers."[3] Those who used the term Family Center did so to emphasize the participation of all family members. This is true of the O'Hearn School.

The use of space for the center also reflects the inclusive and supportive approach of this school. Before opening the center in 1991, families, teachers, and the principal discussed the problem of lack of space for a family center in the building. Their decision to share space with the library and to focus on activities that bind families and schools together reflects the school's emphasis on pulling people together to support the formal instructional programs of schools and the needs of families.

Schools are places of formal instruction for children, and the physical space in schools is designed to support the program of formal instruction. Such support includes physical space for nurses, librarians, counselors and custodians as well as a teachers' room -- a space for teachers to eat, plan, meet, relax, and reflect. These spaces are designed for people that the school system brings into the school in a formal, contractual, bureaucratic relationship. These people are employed by the school system to support the formal instructional process, and the spaces they occupy are also designed to support formal instruction.

In contrast, space for parents is usually made available to them because they request it (or because they join with school staff in requesting it). Parents' requests for space are connected to their involvement in activities that not only support formal instruction, but also promote partnership and collaboration between families and schools and support people, including parents, teachers, and children in order to enable those people to improve the delivery of formal instruction.

None or only a few of the parents who use the parent center space are employed by the school. Parents aren't brought to the school by the school system, but come as volunteers to help the children, teachers, and the school. Parents'

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[3] Two are called "parent rooms" rather than "center." Several include the word "outreach" in their names to emphasize their mission; one center is called a parent/teacher center to demonstrate focus on partnership. Other names include: Family Center, Parent-Community Networking Center, Link, Parent Resource Room, Learning Lab for Students and Parents, Parent Volunteer Room, Families for R.E.A.L. (Resources for Early Access to Learning), and Community Room.

relationship to schools, therefore, is not formal, contractual, and bureaucratic as is the case with school employees, but informal, voluntary, and supportive. The lack of formal relationships to the school system can make parent centers vulnerable to shifts in school and district policies. This often shows up as school districts weigh the use of space. In one district, for example, a parent center was ordered closed when space was needed for a classroom. Obviously, classroom space for children must have first priority in schools. Because there was no category for parent centers on space utilization forms however, the parent center was listed in the central office as unused space. Therefore, no alternative space was considered for the parent center when the space it occupied was required for a classroom and it was closed. Although parent center activities in the school didn't stop completely, many were put on hold until another space for the center was identified.

Parent center space, unlike other space in schools, is used both for personal development of parents and families as well as for training and preparation of parents (or other community participants) to assist teachers, administrators, individual children, or whole groups: to work in classrooms or other areas of the school; to help with school events; to participate in school governance or conduct other volunteer activities.

At the O'Hearn School, the sharing of space between a library and a family center brings the overlapping spheres of influence in a child's life into one space while serving the multiple needs of children, families, teachers, and the school. The sharing of space reinforces the focus on inclusion in the school. As noted by Etta Green Johnson (1991) this school has: "An inclusive approach to the community's racial and cultural diversity, classroom and extra-curricular inclusion of students across levels of ability and disability, and family inclusion" (p. 47).

The structure of the parent involvement program in this school illustrates why space limitations need not deter either the development of programs to promote school-home collaboration nor the development of a parent center. The school's parent handbook points out that: "The Center is open to all parents and families of the school as a place to socialize, learn and get support." Two or three parents head each of the five Family Center committees: 1) social events, 2) educational workshops, 3) family support group, 4) food/maintenance, and 5) special education support.

Because the center shares space with the school library and meetings cannot be held there when the library is used by classes, the five committees' work of planning and development of activities is carried out in meetings in other places. Events and activities are then held in the center based on the availability of space in the room. In addition, as the principal, Dr. William Henderson, notes: "The Family Center is only a piece of what we do (in parental involvement). It's more than the Center's being in the school, it's also parents reaching out to other families in homes. It's a different

committee, but all part of the same effort." The point therefore, is not simply to have a place, a center, to which parents can come, the point is to develop collaborative relationships between school and families. A parent center is a useful part of that effort, and lack of adequate space does not deter the effort. The center is not only a place, but also a means toward achieving a larger goal.

The O'Hearn School has two outstanding features: first, a Family Center; second, multiple leaders. Like all schools that are sincerely trying to develop home-school partnerships, the school recognizes that children's families are not restricted to parents. Children's caretakers may also include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, other relatives, guardians, as well as extended-family members. Affirming the African proverb that "it takes a whole village to raise a child," the school welcomes family members of varying backgrounds, interests, and skills into classrooms, activities, and programs. The Family Center focus is related to the school focus on inclusion as a Special Education integration model. The school therefore sponsors special programs to involve all family members in events such as family math night and welcoming family breakfasts, and these activities are coordinated by the Family Center. Coordination is carried out by 12-15 multiple leaders of special events committees, and the leadership positions rotate. "The objective is to empower people rather than create dependency on one person," the principal noted. He added that when properly coordinated, multiple leadership is both more effective and more inclusive than single person leadership.

A major challenge posed by the school's objective of inclusion is that of reaching and involving all families in the school. In this school, that challenge is tied to the need to find more effective ways to reach out to families in crises as they try to meet basic needs including food, shelter, and safety. A Family Outreach Committee based in the Family Center works with the principal to try to assist all families through home visits which include materials for parents and children to use in home learning activities. The school's home-reading program includes home visits along with free books, tips to parents about reading to children, and library trips and cards. The program emphasizes consistent encouragement, which includes frequent follow-up phone calls to the family following the home visits.

Results from the Survey of 28 Schools: Funding and Staffing

Funding. Respondents to the survey questionnaire in the initial parent center study reported that funding for parent centers varies considerably. The data on funding for the 28 schools are incomplete and uneven. Some respondents indicated that it is difficult to separate parent center funds from funds for other school programs because funds for staff come from one budget while funds for activities and equipment come from other budgets. Some respondents included in-kind staff time as a parent center budget item although no funds were received by the center for this item. Others

included some general school funds in the parent center budget when school-wide activities were coordinated by the parent center. Such flexibility in developing parent center budgets can have both positive and negative effects.

One positive possibility is that with greater flexibility schools can support parent centers by funding them from a wide range of school resources available to pay for staffing, equipment, books, other materials, and food. A negative feature might be that the lack of clearly defined funding sources restricts long-term planning in the parent center if there are funding uncertainties. Because most parent centers are new school activities with no institutional tradition to support their development, their funding is often uncertain. The centers are very vulnerable to funding cuts in school budgets which may affect their staffing and programs. Such vulnerability is reduced when the development of parent centers is tied to program funding -- for example, the Boston Public Schools required the development or expansion of parent centers in order for schools to receive federal funds for a comprehensive substance abuse program. (See the cross-site analysis section of this report).

Staffing. In the initial study of parent centers, schools reported that staff in the centers is sometimes voluntary, but most respondents indicate the presence of paid staff or say they are fundraising for paid staff. The consensus is that paid, stable staff is required to coordinate parental involvement and to make the parent center a consistent and continuing part of the school program. Most of the staff are parents or former parents from the school, but about one-third of the centers have teachers as coordinators. The rationale is usually that teachers get other teachers involved in activities with parents, and that outreach to assist children is most successful when teachers reach out to parents. In addition to regular staff persons, most centers report that volunteers are available for special activities and events. For example, a parent may come in to provide a few hours of child care while other parents are in a meeting or accompanying a field trip. Additional volunteers are also available for large events to assist the core staff. Teachers as well as parents provide additional volunteer assistance in most centers.

Barry A. Bernstein, former principal of the Alonzo E. Horton Elementary School in San Diego, noted a possible staff problem in efforts to expand outreach to parents when staff gets very stretched. He commented: "We must be sure to recognize staff for their efforts. Teachers have regular curricular things to do plus other responsibilities linked to changes in educational priorities in the district. Changes to portfolios and other written assessment rather than letter grades create extra responsibility for teachers, so that communication with parents can be difficult to maintain, especially since parents' time is also limited."

In our next case study, the addition of two outreach consultants, funded by a state dropout prevention program, assists in maintaining home-school communication.

School Case Example 3

A Family Center's Staffing and Funding Support Diverse Cultural Workshops

"How can I help my child with homework I don't understand?" asked a parent in Spanish. "By encouraging the child to do the homework and explain it to you," responded the workshop leader. "That lets your child know that you believe the homework is important, that you are willing to take the time to listen and that you have faith in your child's ability to explain what she or he is doing. Those are all powerful messages that you need to give your children regularly."

"How can I encourage him when he doesn't want to do the homework?" asked another parent standing to be heard from the back of the room. "First, set aside a time for homework each day." After pausing, the workshop leader then said with slow emphasis: "And turn off the television!" Then he continued with the last two suggestions, "Listen carefully to your child's explanation of the work and ask questions until you understand it." After repeating the four suggestions, the workshop leader expanded the ideas. "Explaining the work will help your child to think about it more carefully and improve his or her confidence about understanding the work. Keep at it and the child's grades will improve with the reinforcement you're giving at home. It's not the amount of education you have that makes the difference in your ability to help your child; it's the amount of care you show by encouraging and spending time listening to your child's explanations, ideas, and interests -- that's what makes the difference."

The workshop exchange described above might have occurred in Spanish, English, or Laotian at the Horton School because workshops addressing parents' questions about parental involvement in schools have been provided within cultural context for Latinos, African Americans, and Vietnamese during the past several years. These culturally based workshops are a component of an evolving parent center program in which staffing and funding also illustrate unusual flexibility and support for school diversity in a rapidly growing school population in San Diego.

School Context

Situated in a community of single-family houses, apartment buildings, and duplexes, the Alonzo E. Horton Elementary School is located near a busy intersection in a diverse area that also includes some commercial enterprises.

The diversity is also seen in the student population grades K-6 which is 44.6% Latino, 25.7% African American, 15.4% white, 11.8% Indochinese, and 2.5% other. Many students are on the free or reduced lunch program. Over 50% of the 1,120 students have a primary language other than English. Focus on language is an outstanding feature of the school's special programs. Their Spanish Language Immersion Program received a first place award for innovative programs in the state.

The school is also an Accelerated Learning Magnet, affiliated with the Henry Levin program based at Stanford University, and it joins with a local university to

sponsor a nationally recognized conference on this topic each year. Another feature of the school's program is team teaching that allows teachers to group students more flexibly, focus on their areas of expertise, and use collaborative teaching methods. About half of the staff of 36 classroom teachers, two administrators, a counselor and a school nurse have been at the school three years or longer and many have postgraduate degrees.

With the expanding student population, five portable classrooms have been added to the school and the problem of overcrowding is a concern of parents and community volunteers as well as the school staff. Movement to a single-track, year-round calendar structure is occurring as a means of addressing this concern. The use of 34 classroom instructional aides and other paraprofessionals also provides additional assistance for students.

Parent Center

The parent center in the school is currently being developed through the efforts of some active parents and two staff people (Outreach Workers) who conduct home visits for a state-funded program operating in the school. The two female staff people, one African American and the other Latino, are already closely connected to families in the school. A state-funded dropout prevention program to prevent student drop-outs requires the staff to make home visits to families and to work in school with children who are "at risk" of failing when personal and family problems reduce their attention span, attendance, and performance in school. The program combines some of the previous tasks of truant officers with some current techniques of counseling and family therapy to provide support for children and their families. The two staff persons in this program have sustained interaction with families. They report that during home visits, they promote parental participation in school and assist parents in home learning activities, in monitoring homework, and other techniques of reinforcing school skills.

The two staff persons assess needs and collaborate with parents they visit, the principal, and other school staff and parents in the school to develop programs responsive to needs that parents identify. A parent center is therefore currently being developed in the school because a place is needed for coordination of these programs. However, before discussion about the parent center got underway, staff and parents in the school worked together to organize and conduct workshops that reinforce racial and ethnic identity and address concerns within specific cultural contexts. The workshops demonstrated parents' needs, requests, and communication with the school and school responsiveness to parents. The mutual interests and respect reinforced in this process paved the way for a more permanent parent center to continue coordinating such programs.

Based on data from the initial study of 28 parent centers, the prevailing principle that seems to guide the design and functioning of the centers is that parents and families need support themselves in order for them to better support children and teachers in the instructional program of schools. Because the Horton school didn't have the necessary resources to provide the workshops parents requested, school staff and parents found community groups able to provide the services needed. The community groups are educational organizations that give workshops to demystify school culture and work as "mediating structures" linking schools to families.

Mediating structures represent another example of support that promotes greater overlap between the two spheres representing families and schools within Epstein's (1987) model. Mediating structures have been defined by Berger and Neuhaus (1980) as: "...those institutions standing between the individual and his private life and the large institutions of public life" (p. 2). Mediation occurs when people we know and trust represent our interests to people we know less well or not at all. Mediation is therefore a special type of advocacy because it provides representation of our interests by advocates with greater power than we have. In the case of schools, the greater power of representatives may take the form of greater knowledge of: 1) language used in the school, 2) school requirements and procedures, 3) school curriculum, 4) expectations of the school (or of a particular teacher) for children's behavior (including, but not limited to discipline), and 5) school culture, which determines who to speak to, when and how, and what to ask for. Items one through five involve negotiating the complicated institutional culture of schools that requires knowledge of school norms, mores, and styles.

Diverse Cultural Workshops

Community groups that served as "mediating structures" were selected by staff and parents in the Horton School to present workshops that assisted two cultural groups in the school (Latino and African-American). Laotian parents participated in workshops led by their children's bilingual teacher who served as mediator for them. These groups were helped in learning about the norms, mores, styles, and procedures that operate in the school; how to negotiate the complex terrain of school culture including curriculum, schedules, expectations, discipline and grading; and how to be effectively involved in their children's education at school and at home.

Latino Workshops. Latino parents, the largest cultural group in the school, are involved in two groups of workshops, one health-related and the other school-related. The health-related program, called "Parents Growing Together" (PGT) in English, is a child development program developed by school psychologists to help parents -- especially young parents -- learn about children's physical growth and emotional development and how parents can best help their children at each developmental stage. The program is an outgrowth of state legislation that funds

programs under a "Healthy Start" project to promote preventive health care for children. Seven elementary schools that feed into one middle school participate in the program in order to coordinate social, health, and school services for children by educating parents in preventive health care. The child development program is presented in Spanish, and parents are encouraged to discuss child-rearing practices, growth and development incidents, illnesses and problems, and their concerns about children's physical, emotional, or academic progress.

Recently, the school began another program, in which Latino parents are about 90% of the participants, called "The Parent Institute" (Gaines, 1988). This is a community-based program started by a Mexican-American minister who is very concerned because Latino students have the highest drop-out rate of all students in the city. He believes that the way to reduce the dropout rate is to involve Latino parents in their children's education. The program, which he began in 1987, provides a six-week course covering the following topics: 1) Home-School Collaboration; 2) The Home, Motivation, and Self-Esteem; 3) Communication and Discipline; 4) Drugs, Home, School, and Community; 5) How the School System Functions; and 6) Study Course: College and Career Election. Parents with much or little formal education learn about ways they can help their children learn school skills as well as questions to ask at parent-teacher conferences. Festive graduation ceremonies mark the end of the six-week course, which has already graduated more than 1,900 parents throughout the city.

African-American Workshops. African-American parents attend a program provided by a community group called the Center for Parent Involvement in Education (CPIE). The program was started in 1989 by "...concerned parents, educators and community leaders to address the educational crises facing African American families," as noted in the organization's brochure *(CPIE Toward A Generation of Excellence,* p.1 nd). The program has three components: 1) a campaign, 2) parent education, and 3) parent-to-parent support. The "Campaign for Parent Involvement in Education" includes door-to-door home visits in selected neighborhoods followed by a "Rally for Education," which is a mixer held in a community center to bring families together to talk about the education of their children. These events are followed by "Education Awareness Month" and "Education Sunday" in local churches.

A parent education component with six weekly workshops follows the campaign. This component was presented at the school in February and March 1993. The workshops focus on: 1) Parents Rights and Responsibilities; 2) Supporting Children's Education at Home; 3) Building Children's Self-Esteem; 4) Understanding Child Development; 5) Understanding Peer Pressure; and 6) Communicating and Effective Listening. Also included is a parent-to-parent component in which parents volunteer and receive training to help each other when children are experiencing difficulty in school. This program serves three to five schools in the city per school

quarter, and it is seeking to mobilize and activate 3,300 parents of African-American children within the next three years.

Laotian Workshops. Laotian parents in the school speak little or no English and thus depend on their children's bilingual teacher to assist them in learning about parental involvement strategies. All of the parents are very close to the teacher, who helps them learn English and learn to deal with the school system and other institutions, organizations, and agencies. These parents also receive information about parenting skills, children's growth and development, and gang prevention, as well as explanations about homework from the teacher. Most of these parents volunteer in the class and learn how to monitor their children's homework despite their limited English proficiency.

Moving Toward a Parent Center

In addition to providing workshops to address parents' concerns in cultural context, the school also has a community meeting room where parents join teachers and other school staff to discuss school-wide concerns. Equipped with refrigerator, microwave, and soft-drink machine, the meeting room occupies an entire bungalow on the school grounds. Parent meetings, workshops, and training sessions have also been held in this room. However, since it is such a busy gathering place for the entire school and it does not have storage or office space, the Outreach Workers and interested parents are working with the principal to locate another space in the school to designate as a parent center.

Results from the Survey of 28 Schools: Parent Center Hours of Operation and Activities

Parent center staff report that two important features for promoting greater participation by all groups within a school are flexible hours of operation and activities that respond to the diverse needs of changing family structures and working parents.

Hours of operation in the centers that responded to the 1991 survey questionnaire vary tremendously. Some centers are open a few hours daily; others are open only afternoons; some are open several days a week. Seven of the 28 centers are open by 7:30 in the morning, giving parents a chance to get together when bringing children to school. Most centers are open for special school events that are held on evenings and weekends, such as open house and fairs and carnivals. Only two of the centers are open more than ten hours a day, but 19 of the 28 remain open seven or more hours on school days.

Most centers report that the necessity for connecting their hours of operation to normal school hours and vacations constrains parents from coming to the center

during evenings and weekends when they are most likely to have time. Constraints also occur when custodians or other school caretakers are not available to open and close the school building. Most schools simply find creative ways to work around the limitations.

The hours of operation depend on parents' needs, staffing, and the ebb and flow of school activities. The number and extent of activities are closely related to hours of operation, but some centers implement a large number of activities by developing a schedule in which the center's hours increase with the demands of other school activities. Just before the holidays in December, or graduation in June, parent center activity becomes very intense in most schools as larger numbers of parents, teachers, and community residents meet to plan, sew, cook, design, draw, paint, and repair for school events. In the midst of this flurry of production, children may also receive tutoring, parents may phone other parents to share information, teachers may drop in to request volunteers for classroom activities or field trips, and donors may bring items for a clothing bank. Parent center activities represent diverse responses to family and school needs within flexible, supportive program structures.

The results of a flexible, supportive program structure are seen in the activities of the parent center at Memorial Academy in San Diego, the fourth School Case Example. The center is open Monday through Friday, with hours of operation corresponding to the regular school day. The principal noted, however, that the center (or Parent Room, as it is called) can be open evenings and weekends upon request. Not only is the Parent Room an integral part of the school through its hours of operation, but also through activities which indicate a high level of teacher-parent cooperation that is unusual in junior high schools.

School Case Example 4

A Parent Room Supports a Sense of Community

As the giggling started again in the back of the room, the teacher looked up from helping a student. Over the student's shoulder, she saw a scene that had been repeated several times during the past week. Three students were passing notes and giggling among themselves. Other students were silently reading, writing in their journals, or preparing their class presentations. The three giggling students were not engaged in classwork and they were repeating behavior about which she had spoken to them twice.

The teacher finished answering the student's question and reached for a "Parent Presence Form," in a file on her desk. She filled in the form, indicating her name and class time and place as well as a brief description of the inappropriate behavior of the three students. When the fourth period class ended, she dropped off the form in the Parent Room on her way to lunch. Two days later, as students entered her fourth period class, two women entered with them and took seats at the back of the class. They sat quietly as students worked at their seats and listened attentively as students made the biography presentations they had been preparing for the past several weeks. During the presentations, the teacher glanced over to the back left section of the class and the three former giggling students sat qui-

ctly with no sign of misbehavior. The class went smoothly and as it ended teachers and students smiled at the two parents as they were leaving the room.

Not all Parent Presence activities operate as smoothly as the one described above; students may continue inappropriate behavior in a defiant manner. But those are the exceptions. Most misbehaving students respond positively to the powerful message given by the parents' presence in the room -- that parents support the teacher and the other students who are behaving appropriately. The power of parents' presence is significant. It reinforces the common value system of the school community and shows the power of action over words. The parents don't usually have to say anything, they are just there in the classroom demonstrating a powerful presence. That presence shows they care about students, they know what's going on in classrooms, and they are partners with teachers. The parents represent legitimate authority in support of teachers as legitimate authority. Almost all students get the message and respond positively.

The high level of involvement of parents in this school and particularly their presence in the classroom, are unusual in junior high schools. Parental involvement in schools decreases as children reach adolescence and continues to decrease through high school (Epstein and Dauber, 1991). Only five of the 28 schools in our 1991 survey are not elementary schools. Three are middle schools and two are junior high schools. Their levels of parental involvement are unusual, and this junior high school, which the principal notes is moving toward becoming a "middle level philosophy" school, provides a case example of creative ways in which parent center activities and hours of operation support both families and the formal instructional program .

School Context

Located in one of the oldest residential areas of the city, Memorial Academy for International Baccalaureate Preparation is a modern, one-story junior high school. An earlier campus of the school was built on the same site in 1922.

The school is surrounded by a predominately Latino community, and 82.4% of the 1,210 students are Latino, 9.8% are African American, 6.3% are white and 1.5% are other. The socioeconomic range of the neighborhood is from semi-professional families to families who qualify for state and federal assistance. Approximately 80% of the students in the school qualify for the free-lunch program. The magnet school's outstanding bilingual and foreign language study programs attract students from elementary schools, gives them language immersion programs and requires three years of language study to prepare them for the high school magnet program. The language immersion program also includes a series of annual study tours to Mexico for students in each grade.

The statement of school philosophy is: "...to educate all students in an integrated setting to become responsible, literate, thinking and contributing members of a global society." Two special programs designed to promote the philosophy are Socratic questioning and coaching (used in all gifted and advanced classes), and Writing Across the Curriculum, which includes three years of writing emphasized in all subjects. A school goal is to have 100% of the faculty trained in the writing process and Socratic teaching.

The school offers a wide range of programs that allow students to participate in activities of interest to them and provides them with special assistance when needed. These programs include independent study, leadership training, guest speakers and field trips, drop-out prevention, after-school band, in-school alternative to suspension, and small group instruction.

Special projects designed to meet individual student needs include Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Students at Risk (STAR), Gifted and Talented Education (GATE), and daily before- and after-school tutoring. An extended school day permits students to engage in some of these programs and receive additional elective credits.

The staff includes 62 credentialed teachers, two counselors, two resource teachers, and three administrators. At least half of the staff are bilingual and/or hold post graduate degrees. However, more than half of the student population is classified as limited English proficient, and the goal of the school is to have a completely bilingual staff in English and Spanish.

The school credits its high level of parental participation to tenacity and perseverance. It is the oldest junior high school in the city with a continuously active PTA, with minutes dating back to the founding meeting in 1924. Family support is evidenced in the earliest PTA minutes, which reported a rummage sale that netted $14.40 to provide dental services to needy children. Family support has continued and now includes a PTA Food Bank for which parents volunteer to collect truckloads of free items (such as butter, flour, cornmeal, and cans of pork and beans) to be given to families monthly. In addition, during the past seven years, parents have been instrumental in providing thousands of dollars for the ninth grade scholarship program.

Combined PTSA and Parent Room

The PTSA (students are also part of the association) and Parent Room are a completely combined effort. In some schools there are connections between the two groups, and some of the same parents participate in both. However, the PTA often continues its traditional role of fundraising activities and special events, while the parent center carries out a variety of functions to meet family needs including information,

education and training. The result is that parent centers are usually more extensive than PTAs in both outreach and offerings.

In this junior high school, however, the Parent Room and the PTSA are the same; the PTSA has expanded beyond its traditional role to accommodate changing needs of families in the school during the past 69 years. Having begun only a couple of years after the school opened and continued without a break as the neighborhood changed from white to African-American and Latino, the PTSA has remained a vehicle of inclusion for parents in the life of the school. In 1983, the PTSA moved its file cabinets into a room which is called "The Parent Room." It is a place where parents gather and plan programs of family support as well as support for students, teachers, and the instructional program of the school.

In recent years, parents have been particularly concerned about problems with some students fighting, disrupting classrooms, leaving class, and wandering around the buildings. In response, parents decided to be a "presence" in the school. They, the principal, and teachers created the program described above in which, after receiving training from the principal, parents help deliver a positive message of support for the teacher and the school's goals.

The principal, Antonio Alfaro, noted that this arrangement illustrates a real partnership. "The fact that teachers take parents up on their offer to sit in classrooms shows that teachers feel *comfortable* with parents in the classroom; there's no threatening factor there, rather, teachers feel there's a partnership between them." In addition, the parents formed a Parent Patrol to monitor bathrooms, the playground and the parking lot.

To provide an incentive for parents to join the Parent Patrol, last year a local business gave $12,000 worth of $50 gift certificates to be used at their store. For every hour of service parents could give daily for nine weeks, they received a $50 gift certificate. Sixty to seventy parents contributed services on a regular schedule. This works out to about a dollar an hour per parent, but it shows appreciation for their volunteer services. The gift certificates won't continue this year, and the principal said that one of the greatest challenges is to find ways to pay parents for their services in a low-income community.

Despite the usual contention that teenagers do not want their parents in school, students have become accustomed to parents' presence in this junior high school and recognize that parents provide support for them, for teachers, and for classroom instruction. In addition to their monitoring activities, parents volunteer as instructional aides in classrooms, tutor and counsel students, and assist with field trips.

The sustained involvement of parents in the life of the school as a supportive presence in classrooms as well as friendly counselors and available adults helps the school develop a sense of community, which is frequently lacking in schools attended by adolescents. Eisner (1991) points out:

> Many schools lack a sense of community; and many students, particularly during the time they are most vulnerable, their adolescence, are in institutions in which sustained and intimate contact with a caring adult is limited. (p. 16)

In this school, the daily presence of parents who share community experiences with students, and the availability of the parents to students for information and advice, expands the number of caring adults in students' environments. Parents assist in making the school a more caring community not only in matters of student discipline, but also by providing information about resources and supporting and encouraging students to perform well and continue their education through college. Parents' presence in classrooms also indicates to students their support of teachers and the school and their overlap in values with teachers' classroom procedures and school policies regarding behavior and expectations. Therefore, within the model of overlapping spheres provided by Epstein (1987), this school moves in the direction of "maximum" overlap which "...occurs when schools and families operate as true 'partners' with frequent cooperative efforts and clear, close communications between parents and teachers in a comprehensive program of many important types of parent involvement" (p. 128).

In an effort to achieve such a comprehensive program, the junior high school principal told how his school reaches all the parents: "... 1) home visits by teachers, counselors, and administrators, 2) a school car to pick up any parent needing a ride, 3) the staff is relentless; they don't let things fall through the cracks, 4) the community knows we hold them accountable, and 5) the principal never takes 'no' for an answer!"

Summary of the Case Studies

These four case studies of parent centers in three elementary and one junior high school illustrate all eight important dimensions of parent center functioning: 1) definitions/purposes/design, 2)initiation, 3) physical space, 4) names, 5) staffing, 6) funding, 7) hours of operation, and 8) activities. The case studies indicate how parent centers help schools create practices that increase the overlap of spheres of influence of families, schools, and communities in children's education. Parent centers emphasize different activities to meet the particular needs of the students and families at the school, including: 1) basic needs (food purchases and housing and job information); 2) special needs (completely integrated K-5 program in which "special needs children and regular education children learn from each other"); 3) special interest groups in which community organizations serve as mediating structures to assist parents in

learning about family-school interaction within their cultural context: and 4) special concerns which motivate parents, teachers, and adolescent students to develop a caring community.

Each school case illustrates the diversity of activities underway in parent centers. Each case also illustrates overlap with the school instructional program as parent centers conduct activities with families that support students, teachers, and schools, and that enable families to influence their children's academic progress. By serving as a special connector to pull parents, teachers, students, and community participants together and to increase the frequency and duration of communication among them, parent centers have the potential to promote partnerships and cooperative efforts within the whole village to help all children succeed.

PART II: CROSS-SITE ANALYSIS

These case studies illustrate the vibrant work underway in parent centers and provide glimpses of their potential for altering relations among families, schools, and communities. Looking at these four case studies as a whole also can shed some light on how parent centers are influenced by and influence policy; who is served by such centers and who is not; and the effects of these centers on participants, children, and relationships. School practices that demonstrate the potential for promoting successful outcomes for children's learning should be examined carefully to determine if and how they inform policy development, and what links between practice and policy promote family-school-community collaboration.

This cross-site analysis combines data from the initial 28-school survey with highlights from the four case studies. Five questions which examine these links as they relate to parent center policies and constituencies are discussed below. Policy implications, suggested by the case study descriptions and analysis, follow in Part III.

1) What Local, State, or Federal Policies and Funding Sources Influence Parent Centers and their Programs?

A number of federal, state, and local policies influence parent centers and their programs by requiring parental involvement in planning, governance, implementation, and oversight of school programs. None of these parent involvement policies require the establishment of parent centers in schools. However, by promoting both greater and more diverse parental participation in schools and emphasizing the importance of home-school partnership, the policies support and are consistent with the development of parent centers. The centers represent a focal point in schools in which to initiate and coordinate expanding home-school partnerships, including some of the governance and oversight activities required by federal, state, and local policies.

Court Desegregation Orders

Policies which don't require but do influence the development and expansion of parent centers might be defined as *enabling* because they provide the spark and necessary support for the centers to emerge in schools. Many enabling policies that promote parental involvement in public education evolved from school desegregation orders. In both Boston and San Diego, school desegregation orders mandated increased parental participation in schools and provided a policy context into which other policies that expanded parent-school partnership could be placed.

In Boston, the 1974 desegregation court order established a city-wide parents' organization to represent parents' interests and to oversee the election and implementation of school parent councils in each school. Many of the councils meet in parent

centers and use the staff and other resources of the centers to communicate with parents regarding the council agenda, activities, and decisions.

San Diego also had court-ordered integration, and it now has an Integration Monitoring Team that includes parents in all annual school review visits. In addition, the city has a comprehensive, board-approved policy of parent involvement developed by the district's Parent Involvement Task Force, a broad-based group of parents, community representatives, and district staff.

Although school desegregation mandates requiring greater parental involvement in schools provide policy background and context for the development of parent centers in schools, other Federal, state, and local policies have more direct influence on both the initiation and implementation of the centers.

Federal Policies

The 1988 Stafford-Hawkins Amendments to Chapter 1 state that a school in which 75% percent or more of the students are eligible for free lunch may use their Chapter 1 funds on a "school-wide" basis. Since the inception of Chapter 1 (previously Title 1) in 1965, the program has promoted parental participation in schools, and the 1988 Amendments allowed districts to establish parent centers as a means of encouraging parental involvement in the instructional support of children's education. Memorial Academy in San Diego has a school-wide Chapter 1 program, and the enabling section of the legislation regarding parent centers allows the full-time Parent Room Director's salary to be paid by Chapter 1 funds.

The Holland School in Boston also qualifies as a school-wide Chapter 1 school. The principal allotted some Chapter 1 funds to the parent center several years ago, but she noted that decreases in those funds currently make them available only for salaries. Having a "school-wide" Chapter 1 program is still enabling, however, because it requires three-year plans for school programs for the entire school population and parents are involved in developing the plans. At the Holland school, requests for parental involvement are sent to each home from the parent center, and the principal, staff, and parents arrange planning meetings in which school priorities are identified and plans formulated with parental input. In addition, Chapter 1 funds two "Parent Home Workers" whose activities are coordinated in the parent center. They conduct workshops on various topics for parents in school, in homes, and in the community. The 1988 Chapter 1 Amendments also allow funding for parental involvement liaison workers. At the Holland School, these workers join with staff from a community health center once a month to make door-to-door home visits to inform parents about meetings and other community activities related to health, child development, and education.

The effects on students of increased parental involvement were also illustrated at the Holland School. During the final assessment of the three-year school plan ending in 1992, Chapter 1 evaluators identified ten children whose reading scores increased from at or below the 45th percentile to the 80th or 90th percentile in reading. These ten children's parents were among those parents most active in school activities coordinated through the parent center. At least two of the parents also worked consistently at home with their children on school-related home learning activities.

State Policies

The 1985 California State Senate Bill 65, designed to motivate youth to stay in school and to recover students who have dropped out of school, influences the development of the parent center at the Horton School. A unique feature of this legislation promotes home-school collaboration by funding school-level positions called Outreach Consultants. The legislation's definition of an Outreach Consultant indicates that the person is expected to connect home, school, and community resources in support of students: "...a person knowledgeable about school programs and operations, community agencies and resources, and business and employment opportunities who is capable of coordinating these systems and resources to support the needs of high-risk pupils" (*Senate Bill 65 Training Manual, Draft*, School Interventions Unit, California Department of Education, n.d.).

Outreach Consultants make frequent home visits, and parents are included in an enrollment conference when students enter the program. Parents are informed about children's school progress in Study Teams, required by the legislation for in-school skills reinforcement. Frequent conferences following students' enrollment in the program encourage parental involvement in the schooling process.

In Massachusetts, a 1986-87 issuance of new legislation to implement Chapter 636, the state's law to correct racial imbalance in the schools, supported implementation of a variety of prototypes as models of school improvement and student integration. The new regulations also provide a policy framework for the development of parent centers because parental involvement is encouraged in each of the seven priority areas in which prototypes are to be developed: Reading, Math, Linguistic Minority Support, At-Risk, Academic Talented and Gifted, Cultural Enrichment Programs, and Professional Development.

The revision of the state statute provided enabling legislation for the expansion of the parent centers in both the Holland and O'Hearn schools. In 1991, the district in which both schools are located received funds under this legislation to provide mini-grants for eight schools to begin or expand parent centers with technical assistance provided to the schools by the Institute for Responsive Education. Both the Holland

and O'Hearn schools received mini-grants and expanded parent center activity that was already underway in the schools.

District Policies

Two school district policies illustrate the influence of decision making at the local level on the establishment and support of parent centers. In San Diego, a comprehensive, Board-approved policy of parent involvement is implemented by a Parent Involvement Department. A recent program of this Department included a competition for incentive grants among schools proposing innovative ways to expand their programs of home-school partnership. Memorial Academy received three incentive grants in the 1990-93 school years to provide training for staff and parents to improve communication and working relationships between them. It was the first school in the district to receive grants for three consecutive years.

The incentive grant program was school-wide. However, Parent Room staff coordinated the parent component of the training program, provided information to parents about the content of workshops, and provided child care during meetings. Parents' workshops were expanded to include not only communication with teachers, but also with children. One workshop series for parents, titled "Back in Control," helped them improve interactions with their children in order to encourage them to improve their school performance and resist involvement in drugs and gangs.

The grant program also involved staff development for teachers which was expanded to include preparation for home visits. Following a morning staff development meeting, pairs of teachers made home visits later the same day.

The Memorial Academy example illustrates a process of influence of enabling policies (1) that begins with a Board-approved district policy of parental involvement, (2) that establishes a district office to facilitate parental involvement, (3) which provides incentive grants to schools to improve parental involvement, (4) which a school uses to provide training for parents and teachers to improve their assistance to students, who are the intended benefactors of this process. The enabling policy supports the parent center's role as a "linking" place connecting parents to the school. A former parent center director in this school noted that before the parent center was established in the school, she felt that a few teachers had the attitude that they were the professionals who knew best how to work there and parents should stay away. The development of the parent center gave structure to parent-teacher relationships, she said, and she now feels that all teachers welcome parents into the school.

The second example of district policy influence on parent centers is shown in Boston. In 1993, the city School Department began implementing "Healthy Kids," a federally-funded comprehensive substance abuse prevention program. In this exam-

ple, funding policy is directly linked to parent centers. The abstract of the program narrative contains the following statement:

> The grant funds will be used to create and sustain parent and teacher teams in all 75 elementary schools of this inner city school system over the two-year period of the grant. The teams will open and operate *parent centers* in each school, implement a Healthy Kids curriculum for students and parents and get at least 50% of the parents involved in their children's regular education program. (italics added) (*Healthy Kids Proposal Abstract*, Boston Public Schools, 1992)

The rationale statement for this "Healthy Kids" program of school-home collaboration notes that the program is responding to the need for teacher training in techniques for involving parents and to the need for each school to have a place specifically for parents. The desired benefits of the program also are stated in the abstract:

> The program will give schools and homes a shared goal and a project all participants can believe in without reservation. The benefits of the mutual endeavor are expected to extend beyond health to better academic results. (ibid)

The grant period is 1993-95 and both the Holland and O'Hearn schools received funds from this program in 1993 to expand activities in their parent centers.

2) What Formal or Informal Policies are Influenced or Formed because of the Existence of the Parent Center?

In addition to promoting the establishment of parent centers as discussed above, formal and informal policies may also result from their existence -- successful parent center activities can influence future policy modification and expansion. For example, increases in parental participation reported by schools with parent centers, coupled with severe space limitations in many other schools, prompted the district Parent Involvement and Support Unit in San Diego to develop a Mobile Parent Resource Center -- a school bus that has been renovated with tables and special seats to accommodate 15 parents. The bus has also been outfitted with materials and equipment for parents to prepare home learning activities. Since the development of the mobile unit in 1991, the schedule of this *traveling parent center* has been completely filled by requests from schools throughout the city to accommodate groups of parents eager to use the unique space provided for meetings and to provide parent training workshops.

Another example of informal policy emerging from the existence of a parent center is shown by Memorial Academy in San Diego. In this school the Parent Room Coordinator receives requests from teachers requesting parents' presence in their classrooms to promote positive discipline. Also related to the same program was the informal policy that provided $50 certificates to parents participating in "Parent Patrol" at the school. These policies are informal because they are not written require-

ments, but they are nonetheless effective informal policies because they are part of the school procedures related to the parent center. They help make things happen that support the school's home-school-community partnership objectives. Even when these policies change, the practices they supported may be institutionalized and become part of the school's regular program.

In interviews, school personnel and parents did not indicate parent centers' influence on formation of additional policy, but rather they described the centers as special connecting places that support the implementation of existing policy.

Existing policies that are supported by linkage activities in parent centers may be informal or formal. As shown in each of the four case examples, while formal policies require, permit, or restrict specific actions, informal policies often determine whether and how school activities are initiated and supported. This study reinforces others which show that principals or other educational leaders make or promote informal policy by supporting either the objectives of formal external policies or written and unwritten school goals and objectives. The central role of the principal in policy advocacy and program promotion has been underscored in many studies, including the Effective Schools literature and the policy studies of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning. As another Center on Families project has found:

> Informal policies appear far more potent than formal policies in their effects on day-by-day reaching out activities. The school's objective, whether written or oral, appear to have a dominant effect. These informal policies in the form of objectives most typically come from the principal. Our study -- especially the field visits and mini-case studies -- underscores the dominant role of the principals who set policy by setting objectives, interpreting and enforcing or not rules and other formal policies, choosing what external programs and resources to seek, and monitoring policy implementation. (Davies, Burch and Johnson, 1991)

Our four school case examples illustrate how principals' informal policy supports home-school collaboration. For example, principals in the schools supported informal policies to achieve their home-school partnership goals by:

> -- working consistently with parents, teachers, and community participants to set home-school-community objectives, highlight those objectives in school activities, and incorporate them into school plans;
>
> -- using the funding opportunities available through formal policies that promote parent and community involvement at Federal, state, and local levels -- including Chapter 1, state dropout prevention policies, Federal programs to prevent substance abuse, and district mini-grants to pay staff and fund programs;

-- seeking external programs such as the League of Schools Reaching Out that provide information exchange among schools seeking to expand home-school collaboration and technical assistance to develop special programs such as parent-teacher action research;

-- obtaining mini-grants from the local school district to expand parent-center activities

-- encouraging and supporting teacher-staff-parent efforts, including a "parent presence" in classrooms and parents' development of a community resource information bank; and

-- providing services that link families, schools and communities, such as a food bank, parent support groups, computer training, and training for parents for classroom assistance.

The principals' informal policies noted above expand home-school partnership programs, and move the schools from good rhetoric to good practice. Parent centers can serve as a linkage place where parent and community outreach and support programs, resulting from principals' informal policies, can be coordinated, monitored, and evaluated.

There has been no systematic evaluation of parent center programs in terms of outcomes. However, any evaluation that is limited to evaluation of center programs as separate school practice will miss the special dynamic of these places as a mechanism for building broader school programs of partnership. Evidence from this study illustrates that evaluation of these programs should consider their linkage role as one of their major contributions to a school's overall outreach program.

Parent centers often help capture the spirit of legislative purpose because they are designed as unique and flexible places that allow things to happen in schools that are unlikely or less likely to happen in traditional spaces such as classrooms, principals' offices, or auditoriums. None of these places is designed to encourage the sustained interaction between parents and schools that must precede and accompany linkage and partnership activities.

No other space in schools is designed to do what parent centers do. No other space has as its purpose to encourage parents to come to school in informal and consistent ways to learn about, reflect on, consider, discuss, and decide how they can improve their skills and assist their own and other children in becoming more academically and socially successful.

It is not simply that parent centers are "*a* new place" or "*the* new place" in schools where parental involvement occurs. They are more than that; they are the linkage place, the connecting place, the dynamic link that enables parental involvement to

connect to the other places in schools and in communities. With these connections, involvement of families and communities can help make things better for children and their families, easier for teachers and principals, and more successful for all.

3) Which Constituencies are Served and Which are not Reached by a Within-School Mechanism such as a Parent Center?

There was unanimous agreement from respondents -- parents, teachers and principals -- that people most likely to be served by parent centers are those whose childhood and adult school experiences have been positive. Those are the parents who, when learning about the existence of the center, are most likely to drop in for a cup of coffee, join in planning events, take advantage of a parent training activity, or assist in a classroom.

This is the constituency that is easiest to reach, but even these people may not be reached because school programs are limited to school hours and traditional parent activities such as fund-raising and accompanying field trips. By expanding the types of programs in which parents can participate, and expanding the hours to include evenings and weekends, parent centers can reach a larger number of parents who are relatively easy to reach. In addition, four features of parent centers make them more likely to attract a constituency of parents who are less likely to be involved in schools: 1) place, 2) support, 3) response, and 4) outreach.

A Place of Their Own

By providing a place in school where parents can come and "be, decide, and do" as one parent noted, parent centers have the potential to attract those parents who are less likely to be involved because they are uncertain and uncomfortable about the meaning of involvement. They want to learn about how schools work, but they might be hesitant to join a school activity immediately. The style of parent centers is comfortable and inviting and many types of information are provided, so parents can drop in, come with and meet other parents, get the information they need about school curriculum or summer camp, and return when they want to.

No other place in a school is designed to function in this way. School offices are very busy places, and most of them are not designed to be drop-in places where parents can gather and discuss information over a cup of coffee. Many parents are less likely to be involved in schools because they lack information about how to become involved, but they are reluctant to go to busy, and sometimes unwelcoming, school offices to get information. Learning about other parents' comfortable experiences receiving information in parent centers prompts more reluctant parents to go as well. All 28 of the schools responding to our survey indicated that providing information is a major function of parent centers.

Parent Development and Support

Closely related to providing a welcoming place to obtain general information is providing parenting classes, the second most frequent activity in parent centers. Twenty-four of the 28 parent centers in our survey have these classes which give parents in-depth information about childrearing and a chance to exchange ideas and experiences in putting the information to use in raising their children. The classes are also a means by which parents support each other in positive parenting efforts. Today, fewer and fewer parents have relatives who live nearby to give advice and comfort about parenting. Many parents therefore find parenting a lonely process and they seek opportunities to discuss the process with other adults (V.R. Johnson, 1991).

Parenting classes serve this function, in addition to providing information on topics such as positive discipline and substance abuse prevention. Parent support and development classes illustrate a feature of parent centers that distinguish them from other places in schools. Unless there is a full-time community school in the building, parent centers are usually the only place in schools with focus on the growth and development of adults as well as children. This feature gives an integrative dimension to parent centers which is significant because contemporary community services are frequently fragmented by age and type of service. Parent centers that offer literacy classes, GED classes, and ESL classes for adults give parents an opportunity to learn in the same facility with their children. This makes the school a community facility rather than a fortress with walls erected to keep out the community.

Classes provided by parent centers for parental development and support include adult basic education, computer literacy, family counseling, substance abuse prevention, parent support groups, social issue discussion groups, and parent-child interaction workshops. Despite the range of these classes and the comfortable climate in which they are offered, however, some parents still are not reached by parent centers.

People who performed well in school as children and understand school structure as adults are likely to come to school. All others are less likely to come unless special outreach programs are developed to contact them. It is not surprising that people for whom school was a painful experience in childhood, or whose children are having academic or social problems in school are not anxious to go into schools. Parents who do not speak English well or those who do not understand school curriculum or organization are also unlikely to come to school. The people least likely to come are those under the constant stress of poverty or personal problems, including concern about meeting basic needs for food, shelter, health, safety, and clothing.

No interview respondents said they felt that parents' lack of involvement in school was due to a lack of concern about children's school performance. Rather, respondents noted that all parents want their children to perform well in school, but some parents presently prefer not to come to school. Interviews with a group of six parents who do *not* use their school's parent center revealed diverse reasons for not participating. One parent said all his energies were spent actively seeking employment after being laid off from his job. One woman said she is caring for five foster children and felt she could not leave them in the care of sitters. The six respondents said although they are not actively involved in the parent center, they monitor homework and are engaged with their children at home. However, four of the six parents said they would participate in the parent center if asked to do a specific task and not an ongoing activity. One strategy to reach this constituency would be for parent centers to use more consistent, personal contact, and suggest a range of specific activities that parents may select over the course of each school year.

Some other parents may want to actively participate in school, but they are overwhelmed by personal problems, including the lack of basic needs such as food and housing. Some parent centers have responded by developing specific basic needs programs.

Response to Basic Needs

Parent centers in schools are not equipped nor budgeted to provide all basic needs for families. Instead, they serve as a link to social service agencies. Twenty-two of the 28 schools responding to the survey noted that referrals to agencies were made as a result of connections made in the parent center. This is an important function of parent centers, because recent studies (Boston Foundation, 1989) show that many poor people lack information about community services, programs, and other assistance available.

In addition to linking parents to social services, some parent centers provide basic needs programs such as food banks and clothing exchanges. Three of the four case study schools have monthly food banks in which for a dollar, parents can purchase as many bags of food as needed worth approximately $50 each. Eight parent centers in our full survey also address parents' basic needs by providing adult literacy programs, five offer GED classes, and ten centers offer classes in English as a Second Language (ESL).

Outreach

In order to reach constituencies not usually served by traditional school programs, parent centers employ a range of outreach strategies such as notes sent home with students, phone trees, and notices in community gathering places such as

churches, health clinics, and laundromats. However, respondents note that one of the most effective strategies is home visits. Eleven of the centers responding to our survey have home visitation programs, and four report coordination between teachers and the parent center in carrying out the home visits. In one school, the parent center staff are the school outreach workers. In two other schools, home visitors get home learning suggestions from teachers, and in the fourth school, kindergarten teachers coordinate their home visits to every entering kindergarten child with the parent center director, who directs a pre-school program in the school.

During home visits, school staff present information about programs and activities at the school and discuss how parents can assist at home to improve children's school skills. During these visits, school staff may learn that parents who don't come to school are nonetheless involved in their children's education through such home learning activities as storytelling, family ceremonies, neighborhood library activities, and family outings.

School staff can therefore help parents make links between school skills and these home learning activities. Through home visits, parent centers can expand the number of users by reaching and serving constituencies who come to the school only rarely for open house or to pick up report cards.

4) What Considerations Do Parent Centers Give to Infants and Toddlers and their Families?

Parents also are more likely to come to school more frequently if child care is provided at the school. Sixteen of the 28 parent centers offer this service. Child care arrangements vary in each center. Many have a rotating schedule in which parents who use the service spend a certain number of hours providing other services in the school. Others hire child care workers for a certain number of hours per week or for special events that all parents may attend. In addition to providing care for children, some parent centers also encourage parents to join child development discussion groups, and provide information about children's health and growth.

Two parent centers have preschool programs that provide information and activities to prepare children and their families for school. A model program for 3-4 year olds in one school is called TOTAL. Funded by the local PTA, it reaches parents during kindergarten registration and asks them to attend with their 3-4 year old children two mornings a week for two hours each morning. They may also bring their infants and toddlers. Under the guidance of a child development expert, the parents discuss parenting experiences, exchange information about child development games, toys and books, and enjoy watching their children grow. Children play together during the sessions and parents are assisted in learning by observing children at play. During my interview with her mother, one nearly-four-year-old proudly announced

that she is now in school like her older sister and that she must come to school each day because she could not miss her work.

The program prepares children for school, her mother noted, because they see what school is like, what instruction is, how people conduct themselves, and how one should behave in school. Because these 3-4 year olds come to school frequently and go into a classroom just as other children do, they should not have the separation and new experience problems suffered by some kindergartners entering school for the first time.

Parents reported that the program provided adult support and encouragement for them and improved their parenting skills. One parent noted that she feels more comfortable about coping with her child's growth knowing that she has a place to go to raise questions and discuss events in the child's life with a professional. The principal said that she encourages mothers who attend the program to go to child care workshops and other classes, and several are considering careers in child-care as a result.

In another school, a child development specialist provides drop-in child care in the parent center as well as care for children whose parents attend regular programs in the school, including the school's GED classes, which enroll over 100 parents. The program, called "Parent-Child-Book" assists parents in reading to and with their older children and introducing toddlers to books. Parents receive books, instructions, and modeling from specialists, and they discuss their experiences with other parents in frequent meetings.

This program represents a significant collaboration and a step toward integrated services of school, home, and community. It is funded through the state-funded Family Life Education Program. It demonstrates how a program funded to assist adults in literacy and other skills training can be combined with school programs to enhance parental involvement and decrease the project fragmentation which often impedes the delivery of services to families.

5) What Influences do the Centers' Activities have on Parents' Perspectives about the School, their own Roles in Education, and their Relationships with Teachers? What are some Results of their Involvement in the Center on their Children?

Parents' Perspectives About the School

Parents' perspectives on the outcomes of their involvement in parent centers focus on empowerment for themselves as well as for their children. Many of their

comments stress that their involvement opens opportunities resulting from a combination of information and action. They express a sense of discovery of "Oh, this is how it works" or "This is how it connects." Parents' comments about school frequently denote it as a place of mystery despite the fact that they once attended school themselves. Their responses suggest that while they attended, they didn't understand how school functioned as an organization in terms of curriculum, regulations, procedures, or roles.

For those parents, childhood school experiences did not prepare them as adults to negotiate school for their children. The childhood experience of obedient, responsive, unquestioning behavior, which, they felt usually served them well as students, prevented them from initiating action in school as adults. Even for parents who were good students with excellent grades, school culture may remain mysterious.

The culture of school also is intimidating to many parents. Some are embarrassed and others are angry about their feelings of intimidation. Having attended school, they often feel they should understand more about it than they do. These parents are trying to figure out how to learn about school in ways that will benefit their own children.

Other parents interviewed were not intimidated by schools and didn't find school culture mysterious; they simply said that it was difficult to be involved in school if one did not have a work or family schedule that allowed much participation during the day or in ongoing after-school or governance activities. Those parents seek a more varied and flexible path toward involvement.

Parents who are trying to learn about how school works and those who want more varied and flexible opportunities to participate in school reported in interviews that parent centers serve their needs. By providing drop-in opportunities for discussion with other parents, lots of diverse information about school and community, varied activities and flexible scheduling, the centers are responsive places. The following comments illustrate parents' opinions:

> Having me at the center makes school a kind of connected place for them [her children].
>
> Some parents stood outside and invited me in for a cup of coffee. They were very welcoming and I felt that this place is O.K.
>
> Coming to the center gives parents a chance to see what's going on in the school and they can go visit their kid's teacher if they want to.
>
> It makes you feel like you belong here.

I come to the center because I feel my children will do better if I involve myself in their education not only at home, but in school as well.

I feel safer being in the school and knowing he's getting the treatment he needs.

You learn a lot of different things and you keep up with what is happening to your kid -- like homework!

Having the Center makes the school a more open place.

I have so much talent, but it is only appreciated here [in this school, not in her other child's school].

This school is a friendly place to want to be!

Our first priority is to make parents feel welcome here and they can come to school at their leisure. We are trying to make parents feel: 'this is your school and you have more power to be realized' [parent center organizer's comment].

This school makes me feel like I'm included and my thoughts matter.

The center helps the school by helping us all work together, parents, teachers and principal, for the good of the children.

Many of the parents' comments were about the important role of the principal in reaching out to parents.

This is a diverse neighborhood and the reason for the success of this center is cooperation from the top. The principal is not afraid to take a chance and address real issues.

The principal is the key, he sets the tone; then parents feel free to say what's on their minds.

People feel they can make a difference here and they learn to agree to disagree sometimes.

I participate along with all the people here. We have inclusion -- and that includes everyone from the custodian to the principal and everyone in between.

Their Own Roles in Education

As children's first teachers, parents want to continue to expand their role in educating their children in ways that connect with school skills. Some parents see the centers as places that help them expand their educational role through the support they get from each other and from the teachers and principal.

> The benefit of this kind of outreach for families is in getting in and being known so things don't slip by. The teacher knows you and will point out any problem or good things and you can congratulate your child. There is attention paid on both sides.
>
> By being here, I learn what's expected in the next grade my child will attend and I can help get him ready.
>
> The difference for me is in having the other parents for support -- to talk among ourselves about how our children are doing and learn about different things that work and don't work when you are trying to help your children.
>
> Joining in activities at the center has helped me learn about workshops, conferences, places to take my children.
>
> My perception of people and how children should be educated has changed. The scope is not so narrow now. I know the possibilities now.
>
> To just see different kinds of people having similar problems and handling them in different situations has been great for me.

Relationships with Teachers

A number of parents talked about lack of connection to teachers in other schools -- including some schools their other children attend that don't have parent centers. They talked about the distancing of teachers in the other schools and their anger about not being allowed to enter schools when they brought their children. Having a parent center gave them not only regular access to schools, but *welcome* access and cheerful treatment from teachers and staff.

> When you bring a child to school here, you are allowed to walk the child to the classroom and see the teacher....It's a little thing that makes a really huge difference.
>
> In other schools, you're walking on eggshells with teachers, but here, they make you feel like you belong in the school.
>
> Even when it was snowing or raining, teachers would only open the door a peek [in another school] and talk to me. I never got into the school.
>
> Everybody greets you when you see them here, the principal, teachers, custodian, and the kids!

Some teachers acknowledge their fears about having parents in the classroom -- especially on a bad day when the class is not going well. Most say they were not trained to expect or to work with parents in the class and they feel insecure about it.

Teachers may fear having parents looking over their shoulders, demanding special attention for their own children or reporting teachers to some authority for some action perceived as negative.

Teachers interviewed in schools with parent centers say their experience shows that those fears are unfounded. They say it may be necessary to work out differences with some parents, but that's true anyway, whether parents assist in the classroom or not. They report that having parents visit or assist in the classroom has been a positive and helpful experience for them, but they caution that teachers and administrators must really be committed if it is to be successful. The following three teacher comments illustrate this point:

> Having your classroom open to parents makes your job easier.
>
> A teacher has to have confidence in herself to welcome parents into the classroom at any time.
>
> There must be a willingness of both teachers and administrators to have parents in the classroom; they have to really want it!

Some teachers express hesitancy about having parents in the classroom; others note that parents are a great support to them.

> They see how hard my job is -- and I put them to work!

Also, parent centers enable parents to assist and interact with teachers outside the classroom in a more relaxed setting. Volunteer work can be done in the parent center until *both teacher and parent are comfortable about helping in the classroom.*

Influences on their Children's Education

Although all parents report that participation in parent centers enhances their own growth, they say that their main purpose in participating is to help their own and other children. They discussed their children's responses in terms of comfort and support, enhanced motivation, and improved academic performance.

> Children feel very supported when you come to school. Years ago, parents weren't invited into classrooms, but even if I had to peek through the door, I smiled at him. He thrived on that and now he's in college.
>
> They [your children] like to pretend they don't want you to come, but they really do, they want you to come, they really want you to come!
>
> He likes having me around the school...and I like it too.

Parents frequently reported that children in the early school years felt more comfortable about school and expressed that comfort in their behavior.

> His attention span has increased.
>
> He's more verbal now and plays more with other children.

Parents also reported that learning about school curriculum, programs, and procedures helped them to help their children. They better understand the instructional goals and are therefore better able to assist their children at home. The following story summarizes a parent's comments about the influence of parent involvement and personal growth in parent centers on parental behavior in response to children's needs.

> A lot of people want to know what it does to the children. I see the changes in my son. When I don't feel like reading to him, because I don't feel it's important to what I'm doing that day, my son reminds me that it is. Even when I don't think I have the energy, he persists. "Please read me a story, Ma." And the new words that come out of his mouth when he's trying to negotiate with me -- those are the changes. And then I say, Definitely! All this change in me came about because of you. And I certainly don't want to do anything at the expense of you. Then I say O.K., let me take some time with you. Let me finish up in the kitchen and -- here I come!

PART III: SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The parent centers in these four case study schools were selected because they illustrate many features that parents, teachers, and principals throughout the country indicate are the requirements for model parent centers: creative linkages between home and school, warmth, persistence, flexibility, and inclusion. All of the centers' staffs and participants have achieved those goals through consistent and collaborative effort that pushes school activity beyond the traditional parent-teacher relationships to the development of partnerships and a sense of community.

Any discussion of these efforts should not omit the difficulty of achieving success -- the process of building home-school partnerships is very difficult. The tradition, culture, and structure of daily life in most schools do not promote partnership with parents. These case study schools have consciously modified these attributes to make partnership possible. The creation of a parent center is an excellent example of such a modification, because its establishment in a school breaks a tradition of parents as invited guests in schools and welcomes them as partners in the educational process. Parent centers change school culture and structure by making both more flexible and inclusive. A parent center is an indication that parents are expected in the school anytime because there is a place waiting for them.

However, having established a place, it is then necessary to make it a place of connection to children and teachers inside the school and to children and parents outside. Because both groups are accustomed to brief, formal, one-sided encounters that are usually initiated by teachers to give information to parents, the mutuality required for partnership is difficult to develop. There is rarely experience in partnership to draw on.

What is required, therefore, is the creation of a number of opportunities for teachers and parents to meet informally and consistently in the halls, over coffee, in meetings, at school breakfasts, and barbecues, as well as bake sales, so that comfortable interaction is developed and collaboration can be initiated. By attracting parents to the schools and providing a place for them to coordinate activities, parent centers in these schools have facilitated such informal parent-teacher encounters and built on them to develop parent-teacher projects, home visits, and training workshops.

In addition, parent center personnel have worked with principals, other school staff, community agencies and other individuals to address parents' needs through food banks; ESL, GED and literacy classes; computer classes; day care; support groups; and information sessions.

All of these programs require special effort to modify the traditional school culture and structure. These programs are not part of the traditional school routine so they require that teachers, principals, and sometimes secretaries and custodians do more than they would in a traditional school program where parents are infrequent guests.

Lacking a tradition in schools, parent centers and the programs associated with them are fragile, vulnerable to funding and staffing cuts, single-grant allocations, and other resource reductions and restrictions. Some parent centers have lost their space because other school programs were given preference, others have lost personnel or projects due to budget cuts. All centers must find ever more successful ways of reaching larger constituencies even with reductions in funds.

At a time when rhetorical support makes discussion of parental involvement commonplace, it continues to be difficult to sustain parental involvement programs, especially in urban areas. The four urban case schools' persistence and achievement is therefore especially noteworthy. These efforts are not without challenges, however, and from these challenges we can derive policy implications, based on the case material examined in this report and the survey material from the initial report. Among the many challenges which face the case study schools as they struggle to expand outreach to parents and communities, four indicate the types of policies that could expand these and other schools' potential to use parent centers to enhance home-school partnership. These four policy areas are: 1) child care, 2) integrated services, 3) teacher leadership, and 4) home visits.

1) Child Care

This study indicates clearly that the provision of both drop-in and all-day child care promotes parental involvement in schools. Sixteen of the twenty-eight parent centers in the study provide some type of child care, but many interview respondents indicated that the care is limited to special meetings that parents attend, or that care is limited to a few hours during the day. Few of the schools have a daily child-care program, and those which do have severe space limitations.

Long-Term Child Care. The following school-wide child care program is not a parent center activity, but its limitations illustrate the problem of child care relative to expanding parent center participation. The Horton school in San Diego has a state-licensed child care program which includes an extended day component. The hours are 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., so children can come when parents go to work in the morning and remain in the program all day. Children who attend the school can go to child care after school. A sliding scale payment is used and some families are fully subsidized in using the program. However, advertisement for the program occurs

only once a year, and space requirements prevent more than 44 children from receiving child care in a school with more than 1,000 children.

Short-Term Child Care. These space restrictions also prevent the in-school child care program from expanding to include drop-off opportunities for parents to leave children for shorter periods when they are attending meetings, workshops, or volunteering in classes at the school. Thus, although child care exists within the school, it is insufficient to meet the needs of families and cannot serve as a resource to encourage expanded outreach to parents.

None of the schools in the initial survey reported a drop-off child-care arrangement continuing throughout the school day, except one school that had a model child care program for parenting teens who are continuing their studies. All other schools report that they arrange child care in, or coordinated by, the parent center, for certain events. This sometimes takes the form of parents taking turns caring for children. In various interviews, parents, parent center coordinators, principals, and community participants expressed concern about the lack of funding for organized child care programs which could bring parental involvement in schools to higher levels. If such child-care programs were available within schools, interviewees felt that parent centers could extend their activities to encompass more diverse information and training activities.

Child-Care Policy Fragmentation. A major problem in locating funds for in-school child-care is that policy fragmentation in education restricts the development of comprehensive approaches to family involvement. At the federal level, for example, a number of educational policies could provide funds for child care, but the policies are often embedded within "exclusive use" clauses that restrict schools from accessing the funds to serve all parents interested in taking advantage of child-care programs.

Head Start, Chapter 1, Special Education (Part H), and Even Start are four prominent examples of Federal legislation with provisions for supporting the costs of providing families with transportation, food, and child care. In addition, the Federal Child Care Act gives some parents the Dependent Care Tax Credit, a credit against taxes owed (up to $2,400 for one child or $4,800 for two or more children), but the Dependent Care Tax Credit does not benefit low-income families who do not owe taxes. Also, the 1990 Child Care and Development Block Grant program offers some low-income parents vouchers to purchase child care that meets certain quality standards. Given these examples, it would appear that schools have a menu of programs from which to choose in order to establish child care as an extension of parent centers. However, the fragmentation of most of these policies requires that parent coordinators or a school official expend a great deal of time to document which families are eligible for which programs in order to "bill" her or his services to the correct source of funds.

Some families may be ineligible for all the federally-funded programs indicated above and thus ineligible to participate in the in-school child care program at all.

The problem of fragmentation is compounded by the lack of funding sources which enable schools to provide child care on a drop-in or short-term basis. Many of the programs specified above require that parents and their children be participants in the program and enroll in child care on a long-term basis. This requirement may help federal administrators keep track of how agency funds are spent, and may work well for parents who are in the school regularly, but it fails to meet the short-term needs of parents interested in participating in their children's schools. For those parents who want to stop in for a workshop in the parent center or volunteer in a classroom one morning every several weeks, there is no drop-in child care that can be billed to federal programs.

What is needed to meet these parents' needs is both modifications in existing policy to encourage short-term drop-in child care as a component of Chapter 1, Head Start, and Special Education funded programs, and the development of policies at federal, state, and local levels that promote in-school implementation of long-term or drop-in early-childhood education programs for children 0-5 years old as a component of comprehensive approaches to family involvement in education. Even Start policy could serve as a model for the development of in-school child care programs -- it provides for early childhood education for children 0-7 along with the education of participating parents. However, an additional drop-in component is required for parents in schools for shorter periods for meetings, workshops, or information sharing.

Several features of parent centers, discussed throughout the case studies, illustrate their potential as supportive structures for the development of these model early-childhood/child-care programs. Parent centers are: 1) relaxed, welcoming places where parents report they feel comfortable learning, 2) sites for parent information and education regarding child development, and 3) places that are providing opportunities for parental exchange about children's growth and learning relative to school skills. (See page 35-36 for discussion of an excellent example of a model program at a school included in the initial survey study.)

Another program model connecting early-childhood programs to parent centers is found in Liverpool, England. There, primary school parent centers have "creches" for infants and toddlers as both an incentive for mothers to come to the parent center and as labs for child development discussion.

The potential social as well as educational advantages of flexible child care are particularly significant in urban areas, where poverty tends to result in high levels of social isolation (The Boston Foundation, 1989). The availability of in-school child

care and early childhood education combined with parent centers' diverse outreach strategies could bring parents together for mutual support. Parent centers could help develop a greater sense of community for parents who might be disconnected from sources of information about services and from knowledge of ways to assist their children in mastering school skills.

A recent *New York Times Magazine* article (November 14, 1993) notes that the French spend $7 billion yearly for 99 percent of three-to-five year olds to attend pre-school at a minimal charge to their families. In contrast, only one-third of American three to five year olds attend pre-schools or day-care centers, often at high cost. The title of the article is compelling: "If the French Can Do It, Why Can't We?"

2) Integrated Services

The development of all-day and drop-in child care as an extension of parent centers may serve as the starting point for the development of a program of fully integrated services in a school. The rationale for schools as the site for the development of a comprehensive service program for families is that schools are the places in many communities where families are most likely to come. Therefore, schools provide a convenient place in which to develop and coordinate services for families. Because parent centers are the places in schools where adults meet in a relaxed, informal manner and exchange information, receive training, plan and make decisions, it is logical to use the centers as the focal point to disseminate information about comprehensive family services.

State and local agencies implementing policies of service integration might ask schools submitting proposals to indicate if they have parent centers and to describe how the centers might be used as a resource in the development of a program of comprehensive services in the school. In a like manner, schools with parent centers can develop proposals to fund programs of social and health services for children and their families which emphasize parent centers as a school resource for service integration.

As case studies in this report illustrate, parent centers now function in schools as linkage places connecting the school, families and the communities. The Table in Appendix 2 shows that information exchange is one activity in which all twenty-eight schools are engaged. Because information exchange also is a fundamental component of comprehensive service delivery, parent centers have the potential to be the nexus of an integrated education, health, and social service program in schools.

3) Teacher Leadership In Outreach To Parents

Another role of parent centers is connecting teachers and parents in the pursuit of home-school partnerships. Parent centers' role as an informal gathering place where

teachers can meet parents and exchange information and ideas over coffee is a very important function because neither teacher training nor school tradition prepares teachers to work with parents as partners. Parent centers therefore provide a relaxed location in which teachers and parents can meet informally, exchange information, and begin to work out their new collaborative roles.

Teachers interviewed for these case studies said that throughout their careers, they have reached out to parents through notices sent home with children, phone calls and some home visits. However, all acknowledged that they have learned more about working with parents and families since the development of the parent center in the school. The centers provide a structure for the expansion of family-school relationships as parents in centers learn more about how schools work and how they can assist their own and other children. Teachers learn more about families and their needs and strengths, which helps teachers to refine and improve their instruction to children.

Coping With the Reality of Busy School Life. Without the greater structural support that parent centers provide, those teachers who are successful in developing partnerships with parents are likely to be either personally motivated toward such home-school collaboration, or involved in school programs where they observe its benefits to children, teachers, and schools. Despite personal inclination toward parental outreach, or the support of parent centers for their outreach efforts, teachers who want to connect to parents may be constrained by the reality of overcrowded schedules in busy school life. While noting that expanded outreach through the parent center is a school goal, one principal in this study noted his concern about the need to recognize how stretched teachers are because of major restructuring activities in his school district, such as the development of assessment portfolios. These restructuring activities are occurring along with normal daily curricular activity. Given teachers' busy schedules and parents' limited time, communication can be difficult to maintain and its expansion presents a major challenge to educators. The principals in our case studies stressed the need to recognize teachers who take the time to develop and implement partnerships with families.

Recognition Of Teachers' Successful Outreach Efforts. One implication from this study is that teachers who work effectively in those schools which have parents: 1) as partners rather than invited guests, 2) in the school at any time, and 3) and in a room of their own, have a great deal of useful experience to share with other teachers about the barriers to and prospects for effective interaction with parents.

Parent centers give parents an opportunity to move into a domain that was traditionally reserved for teachers. Not all teachers are comfortable with parents' constant presence in schools in parent centers, libraries, lunchrooms, and classrooms. How do teachers learn to welcome parents as partners in the school and assistants in the instructional process? That is a story that teachers can best tell other teachers and

they should be encouraged to do so in a number of ways: 1) through enhanced staff development activities both during the school year and in summer institutes, 2) through conferences for teachers and parents focused on exchange of successful practices like those identified in these case studies, and 3) through mini-grants for parent and teacher teams to develop new partnerships.

Teacher leadership in home-school collaboration can also be encouraged through professional and community awards and celebration of their effectiveness, not only at the building level but also at the district, state, and national levels. This may include awards from educators' professional associations and unions for excellence in partnerships. Similarly, community organizations, churches, and civic groups could establish awards to acknowledge teachers' successful outreach to families and communities. Celebration of effective teacher leadership in this area should include extensive media coverage, which could encourage additional discussion among educators, parents, and community residents about improving strategies for home-school partnership.

Teachers Support Parental Involvement as a Federal Priority. Development of teacher leadership for such collaboration is especially timely. A recent national study indicates teachers' concern about strengthening parents' roles in their children's education. In a poll of 1,000 public school teachers, conducted in January and February 1993, promoting parental involvement was selected as one of the top two priorities for a national educational agenda (*Education Week*, May 19, 1993). Strengthening parental involvement ranked above improving safety, expanding early childhood programs, or establishing tough national standards.

Although teachers selected parental involvement as one of the top priorities in education over the next few years, it is not clear from the survey what steps they would take to promote the priority. One obvious step would be federal funding provided directly to school districts, for use by teachers and parents to develop outreach projects -- including establishing parent centers and conducting the kinds of programs that occur in the centers in the schools in this study.

4) Home Visits

A major policy implication of this study is that support services for families through home visits can be an important supplement to activities and services offered in the parent center. Each of the schools discussed in the four case studies plus seven other schools of the 28 responding to the survey questionnaire have home visitation programs.

Parent centers serve as a useful launching pad for home visitor programs because their structure and activities are designed to connect home and school. The con-

nection is strengthened when parent center representatives take school information, materials, and strategies to homes to encourage parents and other family memb[illegible] to become involved in home learning activities to reinforce children's school skills. The connection is demonstrated by the O'Hearn School in Boston:

> Every new student's family is visited at home by other parents early in the school year. The effort has a dual purpose: to welcome new families to the school and, ultimately, to improve student achievement....Bringing a book for the pupil and a message to the new parents that they have found friends - and a valuable resource - in other parents, the O'Hearn volunteers advance the home-school concept light years beyond lip service. (*Boston Globe,* November 24, 1993, p. 87).

The visits also encourage parents to share their knowledge, skills, and other resources with schools and become partners in school improvement activities.

> Home visits help to gain parents' trust, build alliances between parents and schools, and provide information about how school works....Home visitors provide a unique service for parents who are reluctant to come to school, perhaps because they had negative school experiences or they are from cultural backgrounds in which parental contact with school is limited. (V. R. Johnson, 1991, p. 15.)

In designing policy to support home visitation programs that meet the needs of diverse populations, it is instructive to note that the four cases examined in this study indicate the need for policy that permits flexibility in visitation arrangements to ensure effectiveness. The examples illustrate four different approaches to home visitation: (1) visits made by a committee of parents from the Family Center to other parents, (2) visits made by trained outreach staff who are parent center co-coordinators, (3) visits made by teachers trained by the principal, and (4) visits made by a Parent Center Co-ordinator and Chapter 1 funded "home visitors" from the parent center joining with staff from a local health center. These approaches offer policy makers and practitioners varied examples of ways to organize, schedule, and fund home visitation programs to meet the needs of any school.

School needs can be more effectively addressed when improvement policies emerge that guide practices which reasonably influence successful outcomes for children. The case studies of school parent centers examined in this report provide ideas that can inform school improvement policies. Policy implications have been suggested in four areas to improve the design and implementation of parent centers as an emerging school practice that can help bring home and school closer together to support chil-

dren's school success: child care, integrated services, teacher leadership, and home visits.

Conclusions

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1978) noted that the presence of parents can transform the culture of a school. Traditionally, school culture has created barriers to home-school partnership by promoting brief, impersonal, formal encounters between teachers and parents. The pattern of relationships resulting from traditional culture is especially counterproductive because current school reform policy calls for direct parental involvement in planning, governance, and evaluation of schools. Parents are expected to join teachers, principals, and other school staff in improving daily life in schools, while traditional school interaction patterns fail to prepare parents or teachers for their new roles as collaborators. Schools are therefore searching for new ways to develop relationships that move parents and teachers toward greater partnership. The case study examples in this report illustrate how the structures, messages, and behavior patterns in parent centers assist in linking parents and teachers.

School structure is changed when parents are "structured into schools" with a room of their own, and such *re*structuring shows parents they belong in schools because there is a place waiting for them. The inclusion of parents in the institutional structure of schools also changes the message to them from "you are invited on special occasions" to "you are expected at any time." The changes in structures and messages promote changes in the patterns of parent-teacher encounters from brief, infrequent, and formal to longer, more frequent, and relaxed encounters which are more likely to result in communication and collaboration. By meeting more frequently in informal, comfortable ways, parents and teachers learn to share information, work out differences, and collaborate on activities to benefit children and schools. The potential of parent centers for supporting sustained parent-teacher interaction was summarized by a parent interviewed for the study:

> The center helps the school by helping us all work together - parents, teachers, and principal - for the good of the children.

Given the potential of parent centers for restructuring relationships among families, schools, and communities, policy makers and practitioners should consider more extensive development of parent centers as a way to promote home-school partnership in support of children's learning.

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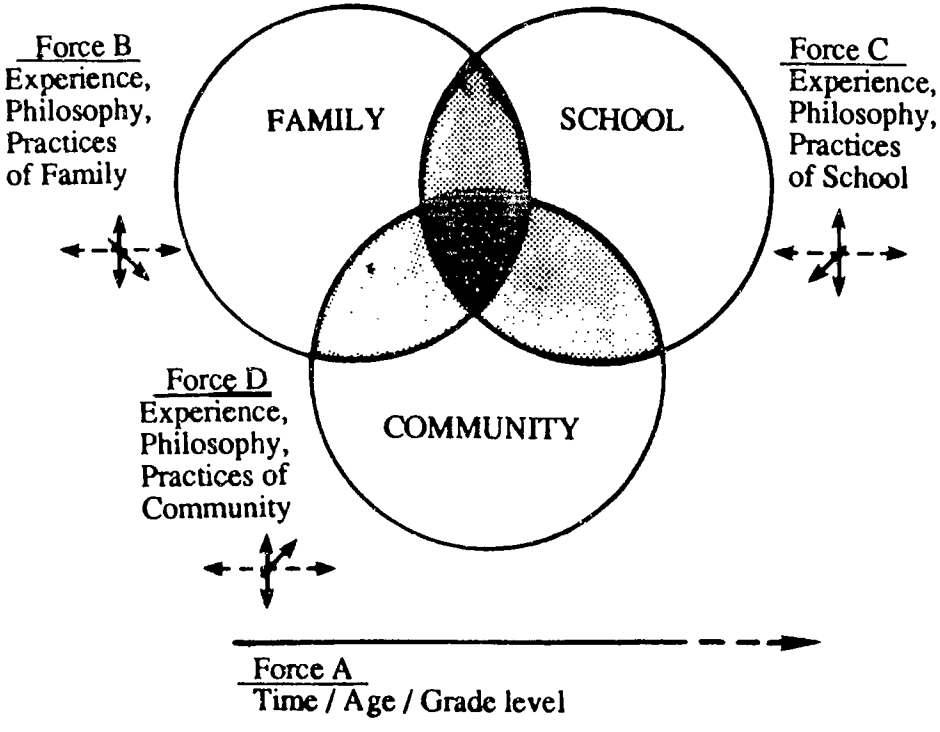
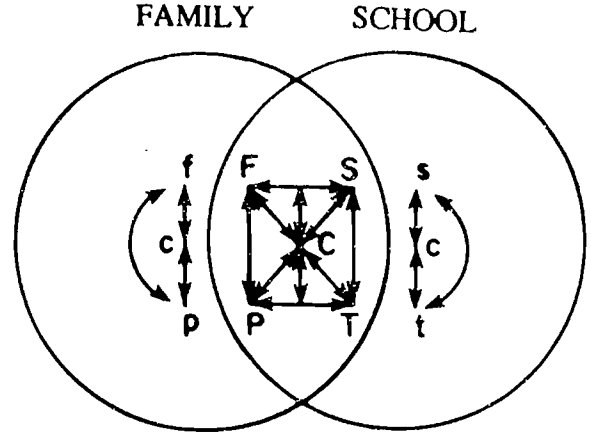
APPENDIX 1

OVERLAPPING SPHERES OF INFLUENCE OF FAMILY, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY ON CHILDREN'S LEARNING

(External and Internal Structures of the Theoretical Model)



(from Epstein, 1987, 1988)



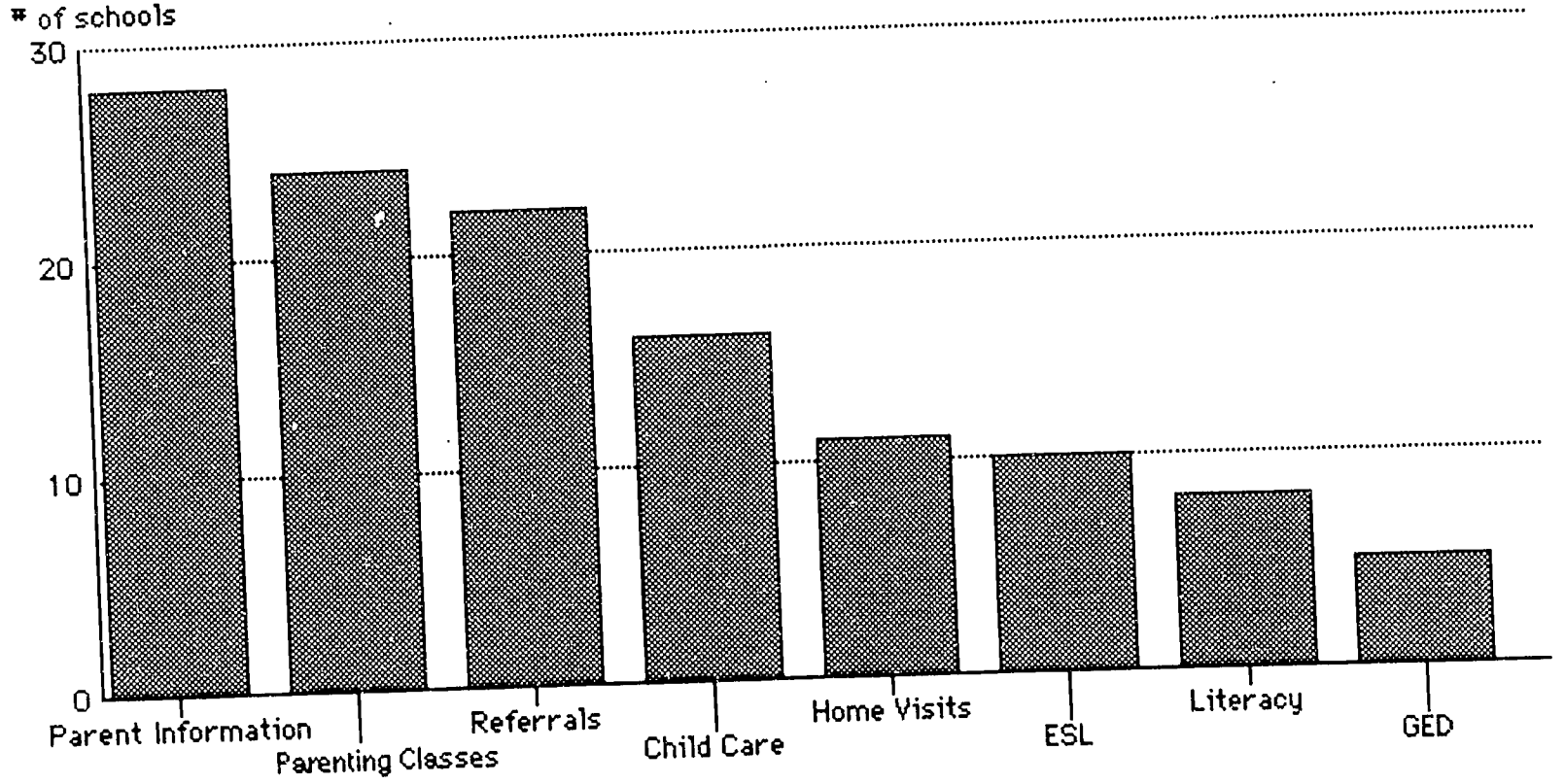
KEY: Intrainstitutional interactions (lower case)
Interinstitutional interactions (upper case)

f/F = Family
s/S = School
c/C = Child
p/P = Parent
t/T = Teacher

Note : In the full model the internal structure is extended,using the same KEY to include:
co/CO = Community
a/A = Agent from community/ business

APPENDIX 2

Eight Major Activities in Twenty-eight Parent Centers
in Fourteen States



APPENDIX 3